Grant Review – Reviewer Process

The Maine Arts Commission places a high value on artistic excellence and social impact of awardees. In addition to this the Commission holds to the strictest standards of transparency and equity when reviewing the materials. If any part of this process seems questionable please bring it the attention of the staff member administering the review.

Information on this page is also online at: https://mainearts.maine.gov/Pages/Funding/Reviewers

Administrative Set-Up

Reviewers take place within the Maine Arts Commission **Application Portal**. Reviewers will need an active **User Account** to access application information. The agency person working as Review Facilitator will connect your user account to the grant so you can gain access to the applications to read, evaluate, score, and offer written feedback to applicants. Chrome and Firefox are preferred browsers for the system.

Getting a user account
1. Go to the Application Portal https://mainearts-grants.maine.gov/
2. If you do not have an account, please create one through the *New User?* (link) https://mainearts-grants.maine.gov/Account/Register
3. Log into your account in the Application Portal
4. Let the Review Facilitator know that you have an account, and they will include you on the review team.

Reviewing Applications

Before you begin reviewing applications, please read the Guidelines of the specific grant you are reviewing. Also check the meeting Agenda to be sure you are aware of the meeting process.
All Guidelines are at - https://mainearts.maine.gov/Pages/Funding/Grants-Home

Reviewing the Applications
1. Log into the Application Portal https://mainearts-grants.maine.gov/
2. Go to *Active Grants* and select the **My Grants to Review** (link) on the right of the page
3. Click on **Review Application** (link) next to the application you wish to view
4. To review, scroll through the application. The top part has general information, the middle contains the application narrative and is the primary material for evaluation, then links to applicant uploads, and finally the application budget section.
5. To enter your scores and offer feedback notes, select the blue **View Scoring** (button) near the top right of the page. This will open the *Score* page for that application.
6. For each Review Criteria you will select a numeric score from the dropdown and offer feedback to the applicants about how they addressed the criteria in the **Note** (fields).
7. When you have finished entering your scores and notes, please select the **Save** (button)

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Conflict of Interest

After you become familiar with the applications that you will be reviewing, you should fill out the online Conflict of Interest Form. Even if you do not have any conflicts, it needs to be completed.
https://mainearts.maine.gov/Pages/Funding/Reviewer-Conflict

If you have a conflict, you should identify it in the form and notify the Review Facilitator prior to the meeting. If you believe you cannot provide an unbiased review for any reason you may choose to recuse yourself.

You must recuse yourself if:
- You have a direct financial interest in the outcome of an agency evaluation.
- You have received a gift or gratuity from an applicant directly or indirectly.
- You have a familial relationship that could bias the evaluation.

Reviewer Stipends

Stipends are available to offset expenses of reviewers. To receive a stipend payment a review must have a Vendor Code number and fill out a Reviewer Stipend Invoice.

Getting a Vendor Code
A Vendor Code is a State assigned number that allows for payment from the State to be made. It is the letters VC followed by ten digits (VC9876543210). If you have a Vendor Code it will be attached to your User Account (or your Organization Account). If you do not have a Vendor Code, you will need to complete a Vendor Form with exactly the same name and contact information as used in your invoice. This can be submitted it through email, surface mail, or FAX to the Agency.
https://mainearts.maine.gov/CMSContent/arts_grants/Grant%20Help%20Docs/Form_Vendor%20Code1.pdf

Stipend Invoice Document
The Reviewer Stipend Invoice is a document that will be provided by the Review Facilitator to reviewers who wish to receive stipends. Information in this document should match the information associated with the Vendor Code and consists of Date, Name, Address, Kind of Service to the agency, and signature.

Extras

- Ensure that your scoring and comments, while subjective, are fair and based on the application materials and review criteria of the grant program.
- There is an option to export the application package as a PDF to read it outside the system.
- Reviewers can change their notes and scores any time before the conclusion of the meeting.
- Writing notes outside the system and Copy-Pasting them in the fields is sometimes a good way to edit your feedback.

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Panelists must have access to the Application Portal to prepare for the review meeting. This is where the reviewer scores and notes are recorded. https://mainearts-grants.maine.gov/

Panelists should note that applicants who have met the minimum standard for eligibility are included in this review. The agency does not form opinions on the caliber of the applications.

All panelists must evaluate all of the applications prior to the meeting. Please set aside several hours for this. Panelists should be prepared on the day of the review to discuss their opinions.

If a panelist finds that an application holds a conflict of interest, they should let the Maine Arts Commission know before the start of the meeting. There is an option for a panelist to recuse themself. Under no circumstances should reviewers contact applicants about their application.

Panelists must complete the online Conflict-of-Interest form prior to the meeting, even if they do not have any conflicts. https://mainearts.maine.gov/Pages/Funding/Reviewer-Conflict

Panelists should take good notes in the Application Portal. **Notes will be shared with the specific applicant, but the notes are not attributed to any specific reviewer. The reviewer's numbered scores are not ever disclosed.** Notes and scores are also not shared with other panelists.

It is okay to have some outside information at the review if the information is public and it relates to the application. However, reviewers need to form their opinions and scores by evaluating the application materials.

Panelists can change their scores and reviewer notes anytime until the day after the review.

Scoring is usually done on a scale of 1 to 7; with 7 being excellent and 1 being very poor. Panelists should not strategize about how one application compares to another, but rather rate them purely on their own merits. Also, scoring should not be based on a perceived need for the money. This is not a needs-based grant.

Panelist should be aware that applicants have the option to upload up to 10 pieces of support materials. The amount of support materials is secondary to how well it clarifies and strengthens the narrative answers. If the application is clear without optional support materials that is fine, likewise for applicants who use many uploads to clarify statements in their application. There should be a 5-minute maximum on audio video uploads.

It is the job of the applicant to offer a clear and compelling application about their project. If a reviewer has questions or is not excited about the project, they should identify why that is (from the application) and reflect this opinion in the scoring and in the reviewer notes.

Applicants should not contact panelists about the review before or after the meeting. If this happens, please let someone at the Maine Arts Commission know.

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The Meeting (Process)

Members of the public will not be present for the meeting, but **the meeting is video recorded, and the recording is later made available to applicants through a private link**.

Panelists need to be online for the meeting and have access to the Application Portal and the remote conference application (usually Zoom). Panelists will be working from two windows during the review. The Application Portal to access notes and scores and Zoom to have the conversation with other panelists. Even if a panelist has printed out the applications and is working with paper, they still need to have access to the Portal in case they wish to modify their notes or change their scores.

Prior to the review discussion the facilitator will frame the review, make introductions, and make sure administrative elements are in order. These include:
- o Panelists have filled out the Conflict-of-Interest Form
- o Panelists are aware of the stipend option and need for Vendor Form
- o Panelists can mitigate poor internet (resize video, turn off video, call in by phone)
- o Panelists are aware of the scoring structure (highest number = best score)
- o Panelists understand the process by which the meeting discussion will take place

Once the administrative elements are taken care of the facilitator will start recording and the review discussion will begin. At the end of the meeting there will be a time for discussion about the overall review process. There will also be a follow-up satisfaction survey emailed to reviewers for additional feedback.

Applications are discussed through the structure of the Review Criteria. Each Criteria Point will be evaluated in terms of strengths and challenges. At the end of the discussion the reviewers will score the criteria and then discuss the next one. This repeats until all criteria have been scored.

Process for the Review Discussion:
1. An application is introduced by the meeting facilitator.
2. The panelists access the application on their computers.
3. Panelists engage in an evaluative conversation about the application and score each of the application criteria. The facilitator helps guide this conversation.
4. The meeting facilitator asks for final comments and final scores (and to hit Save).
5. The next application is introduced by the meeting facilitator.

Panelists do not need to reach a consensus about an application in order to score it, although the conversations should inform a panelists perception.

Panelists do not make funding decisions. They evaluate the quality of the applications and recommend awardees through the scoring process to the Maine Arts Commission board. The Commission Board reviews the minutes and approves the process. Their approval releases funding to be allocated. Awards are not official until approval by the Commission Board.